

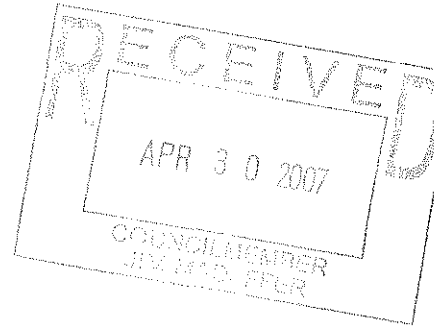
THE MAN

JOHN D. SPRECKELS

BY

H. AUSTIN ADAMS, M.A.

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THE AFTERGLOW

Once in a great while some man makes a speech so vividly revealing himself that even they who thought they knew him through and through confess they never really knew him at all - a speech so direct and simple, so palpably sincere, so poignantly heart-felt, that further misconception concerning him becomes impossible, prejudice evaporates, calumny hides its face, and the man - the real man - is seen to be just *what he is*. Now, John D. Spreckels made just such a speech on Saturday evening, May 19th, 1923 - and San Diego, where he had lived for a third of a century, San Diego which thought it knew him, discovered the real man. It was at a dinner Mr. Spreckels was giving in the Hotel Del Coronado to some hundred or more representative San Diegans. He was just about to round out his threescore years and ten; he was looking forward to the time when he may hope to transfer at least a portion of his heavy burdens to younger shoulders; and, from the depths of a heart filled to overflowing with love for the city of his dreams, he made this unique appeal for understanding and co-operation. The effect was profound.

Here is John D's never-to-be-forgotten *apologia pro vila sua*:

"Gentlemen: I have asked you to do me the honor of dining with me to-night for three reasons: First, I want to know you better. Second, I want you to know me better. And, lastly, I want you to understand precisely what I have tried to do in the past; what my attitude is at present; and, above all, what I plan and hope to do in the future.

"I shall be frank. I am a man. You are men. You represent the commercial, financial, industrial, municipal, and social organizations of our city. It happens, as you know, that my investments here are large, my responsibilities heavy, and my aims high. Our interest in San Diego is, therefore, mutual. If I have not spoken my mind before, it was because I am a man of action rather than words; but I have foreseen the time when I must speak - right out in meeting - as man to man. Well, gentlemen, that time is now!

"Why did I come to San Diego? Why did any of you come? We came because we thought we saw an unusual opportunity here. We believed that everything pointed to this as the logical site for a great city and seaport. In short, we had faith in San Diego's future. So we cast in our lot here. We gave of our time and our strength and our means (big or little) to help develop our city and, naturally, our own fortunes. And I, for

one, have never lost my faith in San Diego. In fair weather or foul; in the face of certain persistent opposition and almost constant malicious misrepresentation, of which I shall speak later; and in spite of delays and disappointments; I have gone steadily forward in my effort to help build the San Diego I saw in a vision on that far-off day thirty-six years ago, when I first sailed the old *Lurline* into our splendid harbor. There have been times - lots of them - when the game did not seem worth the candle. But, gentlemen, I am here yet!

"I had faith in San Diego. I still have. That is why I am still here. Faith! It may be able to move mountains, but, gentlemen, no amount of mere faith ever built a city. Only one thing can build a city - co-operation. It is team-play alone that can put a city on the map - and keep it there. Big cities require big men - men big enough to forget petty personal differences, and pull together without jealousies or suspicions or factional bickering. In other words, before you can turn a small town into a real city, you have got to shed the small town skin.

"Now, gentlemen, between ourselves, what is the matter with San Diego? Why is it not the metropolis and seaport that its geographical and other unique advantages entitle it to be? Why does San Diego always just miss the train, somehow? I will tell you. In three words: Lack of co-operation. We have no team-play. The moment anybody appears with any proposition of a big constructive nature, the small town undertakers get busy digging its grave. Jealousy and suspicion line up the antis and knockers against any man or measure bigger than their two-by-four standards. And if any man dares to invest too heavily, he is promptly warned that San Diego objects to being a 'one-man town'. Well, gentlemen, if being a one-man town is bad for the town, it's hell for the 'one man.'

"Let me tell you my story. Columbus and I both stumbled upon our discoveries by accident. He was looking for India - and accidentally discovered America. The young skipper of the *Lurline* (I was only thirty-four at the time) was looking for fresh grub for his larder - and accidentally discovered San Diego. And San Diego welcomed me with open arms. That was 'way back in 1887, you know, and the boom was just about to burst. The need of the hour was - capital. (It is the need of most hours, by the way.) It seems they had heard of me; so the leading citizens

welcomed me and showed me around town, and begged me to get into the game of making San Diego the metropolis of the southwest.

"I listened to all they had to say. (I always listen.) I did my own thinking. (I always do.) And San Diego looked so good to me that, although I was already up to my neck in affairs elsewhere, I decided right then and there to make San Diego my home, and to do all in my power to help build a great city on the shores of our matchless bay. And gentlemen, now, after thirty-six years, I can truly say 'I am glad I came to San Diego.' Yes, and in spite of everything, I still hope and believe that my early dreams may be realized. I know they can if our village squabblers and small town pikers can be given to understand that, from now on, younger and bigger men mean to make San Diego a real man-sized metropolitan city.

"My first venture here was building the coal bunkers and establishing the Spreckels Brothers Commercial Company. This was fortunate, for it enabled the Santa Fe to keep on running trains to San Diego. The main lines of the Santa Fe system were then in the hands of a receiver, but as I was happily able to finance the San Diego division and to supply coal for the engines, we were saved from being entirely cut off. It was an extremely critical situation. The boom had burst. Thousands were scurrying off like rats from a sinking ship. Everybody who could get out, got out. Only brave men full of grit had the nerve to hang on, hoping against hope, determined to weather the storm. Among these men of courage and vision was the late Mr. E.S. Babcock. Having begun a number of important enterprises, he turned to me for help when the inflated balloon collapsed, and I completed the building of Hotel Del Coronado and the Lower Otay dam. So, you see, circumstances forced me to get deeper and deeper into the big game of helping to develop San Diego. So I took off my coat and pitched in for all I was worth - I and my brother Adolph. Yes, the San Diego 'bug' had got me, gentlemen, just as it got you - and here we are!

"Now please remember that I was not a retired capitalist looking merely for safe investments. I was not in the market for coupon-bearing securities of enterprises already established. No! I was a young man, a young American business man, looking for opportunities. I was out to find a big opportunity to do big constructive work on a big scale - and in

San Diego I thought I foresaw just such a chance. So I started in to buy real estate, to erect buildings, to finance enterprises, and to develop our local resources. In short, I began to lay foundations, gentlemen, foundations deep and wide enough to carry the big ideas I had of helping to turn a bankrupt village into a city. I realized of course that all these investments would never amount to much, and that San Diego would never grow, and that our dreams would never be anything but dreams - unless we secured those fundamental necessities, water and transportation. So I set to work to develop a system of impounding dams in the back country, and a street railway system which would reach out to even the outlying sections of the city.

"Right here I want to disclaim an idea that some of my critics accuse me of cherishing. It is insinuated that because I undertook those basic developments I have set myself up as a sort of special providence or 'savior' of San Diego. Nonsense! I made those larger investments to protect the investments I had already made. I am a business man, not a Santa Claus nor a damn fool. Any man who claims to invest millions for the fun of being looked up to as a little local tin god is either a lunatic or a liar. I, gentlemen, am neither. I simply used plain, ordinary business sense. The city would not grow without an abundant water supply and adequate street car facilities. Any fool could see that. And if San Diego did not grow, my big investments would never pay. So, just naturally, I got busy. If anybody suspects that my ulterior motive was to make San Diego a 'one-man' town and to make myself the dictator of city hall politics - well, gentlemen, all I can say is: Let the imbeciles enjoy their Sun-inspired imbecility.

"Some years ago, when some of our peanut politicians were warning San Diego not to fall for the crafty schemes of the foxy 'Spreckels interests,' a certain well-known wit and sage said that my name must be John Demented Spreckels, because if I was not crazy I would not subject myself to this constant yelping of village curs, but sell out my holdings, put all my money into Government bonds, sail away on my yacht, and let San Diego go to hell - or look to the bunch of anti-Spreckels knockers to save the city, under the high-minded leadership of the San Diego Sun. Gentlemen, he did not know me, or he would never have suggested a

surrender on my part. Whatever else I may or may not be, I am not a quitter.

"I love San Diego. I believe in San Diego. And on several occasions, when the carrying out of some of my larger projects has required their votes, the people of San Diego have shown their confidence in me by refusing to listen to the insinuations of the village vilifiers. Maybe my faith in San Diego has fooled me into running a little ahead of the game. But if I have extended the street car lines ahead of population - if I have built stores and offices and hotels and a theatre ahead of the demand - I can see that this may be a reflection on my business sense; but for the life of me I can *not* see that San Diego has any cause for complaint. Whether or not any investment paid me, I paid taxes on it.

"I build for the future, not for immediate returns. And, gentlemen, what bigger dividends does life ever pay to any man than the zest of creating and developing the one big constructive aim of his life. Well, the aim of my life has been the building up of San Diego. Men like me get our reward in the very activity of doing, or of trying to do, big things. It is my life.

"A 'one-man' town! My God! If you only knew how often I have turned heaven and earth to induce men of large means to come to San Diego. For thirty years I have hoped and worked for men with big ideas, big ability, and big capital, to come and get into our big game down here. God knows we need them! Just see what brains and capital have done for Los Angeles. Why? Well, simply because Los Angeles business men see the need for whole-hearted co-operation; and San Diego business men do not. That is the story in a nut-shell. They pull together; we indulge in a tug-of-war. They build; we tear down. Anybody who says that I have tried to keep capital out of San Diego because I wanted to run the town is a fool or a cheap politician - or, very likely, both. Why, gentlemen, what could possibly be more to my interest than to have men like Rockefeller, or Henry Ford, or J.P. Morgan, or any others of unlimited means, announce that they were about to pour hundreds of millions into the development of San Diego? Would not the value of all my holdings here be multiplied ten-fold? Would not such an enormous influx of capital mean more to me than to anybody else? Yes, gentlemen; and any time that anybody wires to you that he is coming with millions to boost San

Diego I will march at the head of the procession down Broadway, to greet the long-awaited life-saver as he jumps off the train. I will also deliver the address. It will be brief: --'Welcome, *welcome* to our city!'

"One instance in my experience will show you that the glory of being the alleged 'one man' in a 'one-man' town is not what it is cracked up to be. I refer to the building of the San Diego & Arizona Railroad. You are familiar with the heart-breaking story of San Diego's early efforts to become the Pacific terminus of a transcontinental railroad. It is a story of disappointment after disappointment, which dashed San Diego's perfectly justified hopes of becoming the great seaport and railway terminus of the southwest, and finally left it stranded - a little station in a pocket at the end of a branch line.

"I realized from the very first that San Diego would never come into its own till we had got direct communication with the east. So, when Mr. E. H. Harriman of the Southern Pacific asked me to act as his agent in building the San Diego & Arizona road, I eagerly agreed to do so, and I gave San Diego my word that now - at last - the 'way out' had been found. Then Mr. Harriman died, and the Southern Pacific announced its inability or its unwillingness to go on with the work. What was I to do? I had given San Diego my word. I must complete the road. But this would require millions - four millions just for the section through the Carriso Gorge alone - and the money markets of the world were utterly demoralized by the war. No money was to be had, on any terms, for my purpose. And all railroad development was stopped by the Government!

"Gentlemen, if you think that there was any fun in the 'one-man' job just about that time, you are welcome to tackle the next one that turns up, for I beg to be excused. It was up to me to bring in to San Diego a direct train from the east - or go back on my promise. Well, in spite of hell (and it was hell, believe me), a direct train from the east slid into our Union Station on December 1st, 1919 - and San Diego got what I had promised.

"One more incident. Ask the president of your bank what might have happened at the time of the consolidation of the First National and another bank, if I had not happily been in the position to do what I did. It was a very ugly financial situation. I luckily was able to save it by personally wiping out obligations for which I was in no way responsible,

either legally or morally. It cost me several hundreds of thousands of dollars out of my own pocket. I mention this not as a boast, but merely to give you some idea of the delights of living in a one-man town. Yes, damn Spreckels - except when the hat is being passed around.

"Perhaps some of you are now saying to yourselves: 'But, Mr. Spreckels, if all you wanted to do was to build up San Diego, why do you always play politics, and try to run the city council?' My answer is: I *don't*. I have never 'played politics' nor had the slightest wish to 'run' the city council - nor to run anything but my own business. And right here I am going to tell you the straight blunt truth about my relations, past and present, with local politics. Listen!

"I am engaged in one line of business (the street railway) which, being a public utility, brings me into a sort of copartnership with the city - and thus into frequent contact with the city council, whose duty it is to see that the franchises granted to me are satisfactory to the people, and that the terms are faithfully lived up to by me. Now this is quite as it should be. And I defy any man to point to any instance of my ever having tried to influence any member of the city government against the best interests of the city, or to my ever having tried to circumvent or evade the law in any way. You gentlemen, on the other hand, can run your businesses pretty much as you choose. So long as you do not violate a few petty ordinances - such as not to obstruct the sidewalk in front of your stores, not to park your car in the wrong place, or not to maintain a nuisance on your premises - I say that as long as you observe these simple regulations, the city government is no more to you than is the government in Washington. You do not have to know or care who happens to be in the city hall. Gentlemen, permit me to congratulate you.

"But now try to put yourselves in my place for a moment. Before each election certain candidates come out on an 'anti-Spreckels' platform. This means that, if they are elected, they will do all they can to antagonize me. It brands me a public enemy, from whose nefarious schemes these heroic statesmen pledge themselves to protect the otherwise defenseless people. Now, suppose a bunch of peanut politicians tried to sneak into office by proclaiming themselves anti-Marston or anti-Holzwasser or anti-Klauber or anti-Heller. Suppose they pledged themselves to do everything they could do to counteract the pernicious influence of these

business men, and to make it as difficult as possible for them to carry on their business. What would these gentlemen do? They would hotly resent the infamous imputation, denounce the candidate who made it, and support his opponent. Well, gentlemen, that is precisely how I feel about it. And that is my only interest in local politics. As long as candidates proclaim themselves anti-Spreckels, can you blame me for defending myself and supporting the other man? I am no coward. Quit making me an issue, and I will quit 'politics.' Surely, there must be men available for our city government with something more constructive in their heads than the popular slogan "To hell with Spreckels!" If that is the only necessary qualification for office, then God help San Diego! How long do you progressive business men mean to stand for this sort of small-town stuff? It paralyzes progress; it punctures prosperity; in short, it hurts San Diego, not *me*. Think it over, gentlemen, and see if you do not think it is about time to wake up. I do.

"Of course we all know the chief source of the malicious influence which, by fanning the flames of factional strife, prevents San Diego from outgrowing its small-town traditions, and growing up to that metropolitan dignity and prosperity which can come only through co-operation. A scurrilous, unscrupulous, and hypocritical newspaper, whose life depends upon stirring up discontent, arousing suspicion, and pandering to the envy and jealousy of the man in the street, can do much to tear down constructive effort by its destructive tactics. Well, gentlemen, San Diego tolerates just such a newspaper. It is one of a numerous string of similar sheets owned by a multi-millionaire who has publicly admitted that he has made millions by hounding other millionaires and by posing as the champion of the poor, down-trodden working man! What more do we need to say of this man? His own confession gives us his full-length portrait. What has he ever done for San Diego? Has he helped the working man by investing any part of his fortune here, in buildings or industries or enterprises of any sort? No. He has gone on piling up his millions by hypocritically pretending that if it were not for the watchful eye of his San Diego Sun, the people would be like poor, dumb sheep, devoured by those hungry wolves - the Spreckels interests, the gas company, the banks, the big merchants and manufacturers, and everybody else who is trying to build up San Diego. Gentlemen, it is

easier to tear down than to build up. It is easier - and in his case more profitable - to stir up dissension and jealousy than to encourage mutual confidence and cordial co-operation. So this man, like a vulture, uses his vile newspapers to tear society to pieces, so that he can fatten on the broken scraps. That is God's truth, gentlemen, and you *know* it.

"I have had my say. I have spoken frankly in the hope that from now on a larger and more genuine spirit of co-operation may prevail. I ask no favors. I ask only co-operation. If the young, red-blooded, progressive business men of the city will only get together and *stick* together, nothing will be too big to expect for San Diego. Co-operation and team-play can and will get us anywhere. Discord and petty jealousy will get us nowhere. It is up to you, gentlemen, to say which it is to be.

"I bear no grudge against any man; I feel no resentment; and I plan no reprisals. On the contrary, I am already planning very important extensions and developments and new investments. This leads me to say a word about my successor, my son, on whose shoulders must soon rest the heavy burden of my responsibilities, and the carrying out of my future plans. I am no longer young. The term of my active life is drawing near. All I ask for him who is to follow me is your support and sympathy in his efforts to realize, after I am gone, the dream and hope I cherished for San Diego. Gentlemen, I thank you. And now let us all stand and drink to San Diego - united and therefore prosperous."

As with trembling lips and brimming eyes Mr. Spreckels uttered the closing words of this epochal address, every man in the room sprang to his feet, cheering, waving serviettes, not to pledge their efforts anew to San Diego - that was not their first thought - but to show their devotion to the man whom they now knew as they had never known him before, the big, simple, great man, whose greatness his simple eloquence had just revealed to them. And the speeches which followed were not the usual perfunctory after-dinner speeches; they rang with the unmistakable note of sincerity - brief, non-rhetorical, man-to-man expressions of love and loyalty. Every San Diegan who heard John D's talk that night knew that, like a thunderstorm, it had cleared the air.

That his appeal for a new spirit of fuller co-operation and a better understanding of himself and his life's aims had hit the mark was shown a

few weeks later at the great "appreciation dinner" tendered to Mr. Spreckels by the united organizations of the city. More than six hundred men, representing every walk in life and every (former) faction, gathered on Wednesday evening, June 13th, 1923, about the long banquet tables in the ball room of the U.S. Grant Hotel, while several hundreds more were turned away for lack of room. If ever there was a genuine love-feast, that memorable dinner was one. Men who, for a generation, had misunderstood John D., and because of so misunderstanding him had opposed him, showed by their very presence at this testimonial dinner, and by their words of unfeigned appreciation, that henceforth he and his son, Claus, could count upon their cordial support. The hatchet - all the local hatchets - and the animosities were buried so deep that any man now caught trying to dig them up would be publicly denounced not merely as an ingrate toward the man to whom San Diego owes so much, but as a traitor to San Diego herself. It is more than a year now since Mr. Spreckels made his famous speech, and its beneficent effect, so far from diminishing with the lapse of time, grows more and more apparent. San Diego has, once and for all, "shed its small-town skin." No small result, this, from one plain talk.

